

## **Objection to Planning Application H/69278 (Stretford Boatyard site)**

We wish to register a strong objection to the above application, relating to a large residential development proposal alongside the Bridgewater Canal in Stretford. Our fundamental concerns are that this proposal is:

- § Inappropriate – in that it appears to have no local dimension or regard for the significance of the canal to Stretford as a place and a resource for its residents
- § Excessive – in that the density of units is more appropriate to a city centre location and that traffic generated will cause problems for the immediate road network and the Metrolink car park/Trafford Centre Bus stop.

Taking each of these in turn, we would like to stress the following relevant points:

### **1. Background**

Policies in the current UDP indicate the need to consider locations such as this in a wider context than for individual housing proposals. In particular, Policy 1a indicates that Stretford Town Centre is a priority regeneration area with potential for a wide range of improvements and support measures; Policy ENV29 seeks to promote environmental improvements to the Bridgewater Canal; Policy OSR14 promotes the recreational use of the Bridgewater Canal; Policy T1 promotes a sustainable integrated transport network (including water transport?); policy T15 indicates that the Council will protect and promote the development of inland waterways and maximise opportunities for freight transport; Policy T15 also stresses the historic importance of the Bridgewater Canal and the need to promote its leisure potential.

We acknowledge that work is ongoing for the new Local Development Framework and there are many issues raised in preliminary documentation that also indicate a vital need to consider proposals such as this in a more strategic way. The issues relating to the development of the Core Strategy support our view that Stretford Town Centre and the Canal Corridor need to be considered in a coherent fashion and not by ad hoc decisions on individual development proposals.

The issues and options paper notes the following:

- § The RSS seeks limitation of housing provision to that which meets local and affordable housing needs. There would not appear to be any suggestion that this would be the case with regard to this application
- § In Stretford there is a need for more affordable housing and opportunities for mixed housing and employment schemes. The proposal is a single use commercial market housing scheme.
- § The A 56 is a physical barrier with high congestion and poor air quality. This implies a need to link the Town Centre to wider areas of Stretford (presumably including areas across the canal and metrolink line). This canalside site should not be developed in advance of a comprehensive consideration of this issue.
- § There is a need to consider the future role of the Bridgewater Canal and a need to protect and enhance the quality and provision of accessible green and open space in the area. This proposal does not address this issue – but it needs to be addressed.
- § We would point to such sustainability issues as conserving and enhancing the designated features of the historic environment and their settings (e.g. the Bridgewater Canal), and to manage and promote tourism development (again the canal is a major resource with huge potential here).

In recent weeks there has also been a large-scale proposal for residential and commercial use on a nearby site, also adjacent to the canal (ref H/OUT/69239).

Although this was withdrawn before being put to the Planning Committee, we note that the planning officers were recommending refusal on a number of grounds including overdevelopment, traffic concerns and lack of appropriate regeneration effects. We would contend that this application has exactly the same implications and should be treated in the same way. Furthermore, it would appear that the Manchester Ship Canal Company had reservations about the effect of construction and foundations of this earlier proposal on the stability of the canal bank. Again, surely the same concerns apply with this current application.

In conclusion, we believe that the Bridgewater Canal through Stretford could have a massive part to play in the regeneration of the Town Centre and turning Stretford into a place to be proud of and visited, rather than a place that people travel through to get somewhere else. This would be true regeneration. The people of Stretford deserve something better than a purely commercial venture that will serve chiefly commuters. The application should be refused, amongst other things, as premature, on the basis that it needs to be assessed against emerging policies and in the context of strategies not yet developed.

Finally, on this issue, we would point to the key element in the Core Strategy issues paper that notes that there should be increased public involvement and participation in decision-making. This is a situation where such an approach is essential.

## **2. *Inappropriateness***

There is no indication that the homes proposed would be anything other than market housing. This goes against a number of the existing and emerging policies noted above. The canal is a resource for local people and the people of Stretford. The canalside must be developed in a way that emphasises the historic, cultural and community dimension to the canal. It needs to be tied in to the rest of the Town Centre and linked to a programme of sustainable integrated transport (including cycles and water-based transport). It needs to be considered in the context of other significant historic elements of Stretford such as the Essoldo and Civic Theatre. These are the elements that will be central to giving a heart back to Stretford. The proposal will cater only for commuters who see a chance to purchase flats cheaper than in Manchester City Centre, and who will spend most of their time (and money) in the City Centre itself.

We would question whether the developers of this scheme have made any effort to consider alternative uses for these sites. Maximum profitability should not be the criterion here – the site is too strategically important to be released without considering wider community implications. Whilst we acknowledge that major development companies will always seek the most profitable solution, this should not mean that the Council must merely follow the whims and expectations of such organisations. The developers in this case are an international property company, and it is important that they should consider implications of their proposals on local people. A less profitable but more socially worthwhile scheme could also be feasible without denting their multi-million pound business too dramatically?

## **3. *Excessive***

The density of development proposed is more appropriate to the kinds of housing schemes generally associated with large City Centres. This is a narrow and constricted site, right up against the canal bank. The proposal would result in an oppressive outlook for canal users and nearby residents alike. Whilst there are housing developments close to the canal in places such as Sale, these are either on a smaller scale or on more generous sites. In addition, Sale has the Waterside Centre which reclaims a significant part of the canalside for local people – and very successfully. By contrast, this scheme in Stretford, if allowed, would prevent any future development of this important site for the wider community benefit.

It is an overlarge, single-use development, excessive in its design context and in relationship to the future use of the canal. The site may be untidy in its present state, but we are convinced that there are better ways of improving it. Incidentally the photograph in the applicants' Design and Access Statement, purporting to show the existing condition of the site, is some considerable time out of date. The boatyard building and boats on the site were removed long ago!

The scheme uses figures from TRICS to indicate that the impact on traffic would be minimal. We would seriously question the figures used from the TRICS database – the same database used in the earlier adjacent application and queried by your own highways section. Furthermore, the assumptions used by the developers must be questionable. The Stretford Boatyard scheme will have only 22 parking spaces for 44 flats. Whilst we accept that the site is a sustainable location, and on principle we agree with the concept of discouraging car ownership, the pragmatic view has to be one of considering what would happen if all occupants of the flats wished to own and use a car. Where would they park? On the Metrolink car park which is already insufficient? On surrounding residential roads? Furthermore, they would be competing for road space in the car park and on the ramp, at peak times, with commuters parking for the tram and with the Trafford Centre bus. And where would visitors park? There would appear to be no attempt by the developers to create a genuine "minimum car use" environment by tying prospective owners into car-free agreements. Without such legal backup there would be parking and traffic chaos.

### ***Conclusion***

We would be grateful if you would give serious consideration to the issues raised by this application. We note also the imminent submission of a major scheme in Old Trafford (Stratum), also adjacent to the canal, and we see this as further proof that the issue of planning for the whole Bridgewater Canal Corridor needs to be made a major priority for the Council, and that individual applications should be resisted until this has been completed.

**Sent to Simon Castle, Chief Planning Officer, 15 July '08**